

APPENDIX 1 -- Introduction for Classis Ontario West of March 11, 2015

Esteemed brothers in Christ,

I'd like to give an introduction to our proposal. This introduction is on behalf of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church. These comments have been approved by all the office bearers. They represent our shared convictions and our desire to persuade you concerning our request.

Let's first read from Scripture, from Jude 3:

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

This passage speaks of the vital importance of contending "for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." The context illustrates that the gospel was being threatened. The threat was not coming from outside the church, but from within. Jude was telling his readers to contend for the faith as it comes under attack from those among them claiming to be believers. The Providence church earnestly wants to contend for the faith in the face of a serious challenge from within our federation. That's why this proposal is before you this morning.

The issue of theistic evolution is not new in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Let's briefly review the history of this matter. It may surprise some of you, but we need to begin at least back in the early 1990s. In the early 90s, word was already circulating in our churches that an elder in one of our churches in Ontario held to theistic evolution. If you've read the proposal, you can see that this was actually the case. However, these views were not promoted in any kind of obvious way. That changed a number of years ago, within the last decade.

The catalyst for this change can be traced to *Clarion* in about 2008 and 2009. A few articles were published which began to push the boundaries on origins. There were reactions and some of them were heated. *Clarion* eventually put a moratorium on the topic. In April 2009, a new blog appeared entitled Reformed Academic. This blog was created with the idea of creating room for discussion of academic issues, including scientific ones. Eventually material began appearing on Reformed Academic which either promoted theistic evolution or promoted the tolerance of it. The evidence is in our proposal.

Efforts were made to address this problem. Five of our pastors (including yours truly) wrote an article for *Clarion* outlining why evolution is dangerous and evil. Many sermons have been preached explaining how and why theistic evolution is a false teaching. Two books have been published which deal with this issue. And much more has been done besides. Yet, if one is paying attention to social media and such things, it's evident that this teaching continues to find a place among us. That is a troubling reality.

We'll conclude our historical review by noting one of the tactics that's been used several times to obscure the issue at hand. We're dealing with false teachings being promoted especially by scientists. It has sometimes been said that we have to account for the tentative nature of scientific conclusions. There are multiple lines of scientific evidence and they lead a scientist to a tentative hypothesis which explains the evidence. However, when you begin to object to the explanation, the scientist will say, "You can't really say that I hold to this." There is an example of this in a document that was once available on Reformed Academic. Anyone could have downloaded it and saved it when it was available, the assertions made have not been recanted, and so we feel free to refer to it here. It's a paper entitled "Humankind: The Image of God and Animal Ancestry." At the conclusion of this paper, the author notes that Scripture says 'x,' but the scientific evidence leads to 'y.' So what does the author do? He says that he suspends judgment. By that very fact, Scripture is put on the same level as science. Instead, of saying the science must be wrong, he suspends judgment. Brothers, **to suspend judgment is in fact to make a judgment.** Suspending judgment is deciding against the authority of Scripture. In article 5 of the Belgic Confession, we say that we believe **without any doubt** all things contained in Scripture. Therefore, we urge you not to be deceived by this tactic. This is why, in our proposal, we don't interact with "science" and the so-called "multiple lines of scientific evidence." Our concern is solely for what Scripture says and evaluating this teaching in its light alone. If Scripture does not agree with this teaching, we must reject it with all our heart (BC 7).

As you'll have noted from our cover letter, this proposal has involved a number of others outside of the Providence church. Because of the weightiness of the issues involved, we invited some very able and informed men in our federation to contribute to formulating this proposal. Their involvement demonstrates that concern about this issue is widespread. We are not alone in our concerns. We might note here as well that, of the ministers who collaborated on this proposal, none of them were from Classis Ontario West.

As for the Providence office bearers, we would ask Classis to note that we are certainly not anti-science, nor are we uninformed about scientific matters. We have several brothers who are trained in science at a post-secondary level, including a world-renowned medical researcher. In fact, he wanted to be here today, but he had a prior commitment to speak in Asia at a medical conference. When it comes to choosing between what some scientists are concluding and what the Bible clearly says, all of us unanimously will follow the teaching of God's Word.

This is something the office bearers at Providence have promised to do. **All of us** around this table today have promised to do that. When we signed the Form of Subscription we promised to faithfully stand on the doctrine of God's Word and defend it. We promised to "oppose, refute, and help prevent" errors conflicting with God's Word. Is there a more dangerous error threatening the church today than theistic evolution? We can't think of any. We must together do everything we can to put the brakes on this error and ensure that it finds no safe harbour in the Canadian Reformed Churches.

That brings us to our proposal and what is being asked of you this morning. As for the proposal itself, we are asking that General Synod 2016 amend the opening lines of article 14 of the Confession to read as follows:

We believe that God created the human race by making and forming Adam from dust (Gen. 2:7) and Eve from Adam's side (Gen.2:21-22). They were created as the first two humans and the biological ancestors of all other humans. There were no pre-Adamites, whether human or hominid. God made and formed Adam after his own image...

We believe that this will clarify our confessional and biblical stance on human origins. This will explicitly rule that theistic evolution falls outside of what Scripture teaches.

We have supplied 10 grounds to support our proposal. The first establishes that the teaching being addressed actually exists in our churches. We believe the evidence is clear. Grounds 2 and 3 are important because they establish that this teaching contradicts Scripture and threatens the gospel. In other words, this is not a minor or insignificant teaching that could be overlooked without doing damage to our faith. No, we argue that the very heart of our faith is endangered with this teaching. Skipping ahead to Ground 6, we address those who might be inclined to say that this teaching should be dealt with on a case-by-case disciplinary basis. We respond by saying that discipline is typically dealt with in closed session. However, this has become a public matter. A decision made in closed session applying to one person is not sufficient to address a teaching which has found legs in our churches. A public response that applies across the board is what we need. A clear message needs to be heard in our churches when it comes to origins. Ground 7 speaks to those who might instead want a study committee to look into the matter. Our response to that is that we believe the matter is too urgent to delay further. Ground 8 is the last one we'll mention right now. This is important because it establishes that substantial changes and additions have been made to our confessions in the past, especially the Belgic Confession. We're not proposing something new or revolutionary when you look at the big picture of Reformed church history. When the need has been dire, our Reformed forefathers have been bold and willing to make changes to our confessions. We argue that today too the need is dire, the threat is real, the danger is in our midst, and we need to address it with boldness. The best and most effective way to address theistic evolution is in the manner we're proposing.

Here at Classis this morning, we are asking you to decide that this proposal has merit and is worthy of discussion at our broadest assembly. Since General Synod 2013 decided (article 99) that churches may no longer address proposals directly to general synods, we are first addressing you. The purpose of this procedure (of taking proposals first to classis, then to regional synod, then to General Synod) is to weed out ill-conceived and poorly formulated proposals. We believe that this proposal has merit, both formally and materially, and so we are asking for your cooperation in forwarding it to the next Regional Synod East, and via it to General Synod 2016.

Perhaps you're wondering: what constitutes a proposal that can be deemed worthy of being forwarded? What are the criteria? We have a handout for you with some criteria outlined. We have drawn this from the decisions of Synod 2013, our Church Order, and Van Oene's commentary on the church order:

- Proposal is well-formulated with a clear request being made (cf. Van Oene, *With Common Consent*, 146)
- Proposal is well-researched, with clear and sufficient grounds to support the request, grounds with which the assemblies can interact.
- Proposal follows proper ecclesiastical procedure – coming from a consistory/council of one of the churches, giving other churches the opportunity to interact. (cf. article 99 of General Synod 2013)
- Proposal has sufficient importance to be dealt with at a General Synod (cf. Van Oene, *With Common Consent*, 146)
- Proposal deals with an ecclesiastical matter pertaining to the churches in common (CO article 30).
- Proposal, in the main, is found to be convincing. (cf. article 26 of General Synod 2013)

We believe that evaluating our proposal according to these criteria will lead to a positive answer to our request.

Finally, we draw your attention to the fact that if this Classis agrees to our request, it does not mean the end of the discussion for the churches of this classis. Assuming the proposal goes to General Synod, all the churches of the federation (including yours) will have the opportunity to further interact with it. Naturally, your churches will still have the opportunity to submit correspondence to General Synod.

Brothers, **whatever we do, we can't do nothing. The cost is too high.** We could adapt that old saying: all it takes for false teaching to triumph is for faithful men to do nothing. Let's do something about this dangerous false teaching before it is too late for our churches.

Brothers, we know this introduction has been unusually long, but this is a crucially important issue for us. A lot is on the line here. We thank you for your time and attention.